

Cultural
Research Center



Published by
Arizona Christian University Press

RAISING SPIRITUAL CHAMPIONS

Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul
By Dr. George Barna



Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul **Release #4: Survey Reveals Preteen Children Reject Basic Bible Views**

Dr. George Barna, Director of Research
[Cultural Research Center](#) at [Arizona Christian University](#)
Release Date: February 6, 2023

America's preteen children are following in the unfortunate spiritual footsteps of the generations that have preceded them. New research released by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University shows that the foundational beliefs held by 8- to-12-year-olds put them on track to abandon biblical Christianity in record numbers.

Core Beliefs Rejected

Five beliefs central to the Christian faith are being widely rejected by children in the 8-to-12 age range.

In his latest bestselling book, *Raising Spiritual Champions*, veteran researcher George Barna identifies a limited number of biblical teachings that form the necessary worldview foundation leading to biblical discipleship. The five beliefs and associated behaviors reported here are among those he identified. The data from the national survey of children indicates massive resistance by young people to traditional biblical teaching. And their rejection of scriptural truth represents an urgent call to action for Christian parents, educators, and churches.

The most troubling belief patterns among American preteen children revealed in the research are the following:

The Bible

America's children are receiving an inadequate introduction to the Bible. Currently, only 60% have read even part of it. Just half say it contains information about how to lead a good life. A mere one out of four (26%) consistently consult the Bible when trying to determine right from wrong. Even fewer (21%) believe turning to the Bible is the best way to distinguish right from wrong.

Genuine Christians are committed to the notion that the Bible contains the true, relevant, and reliable words of God, and that those words can be deployed as a moral guide. Unfortunately, only a minority of U.S. adults (46%) endorse that thinking. Worse, only half as many young people (25%) agree that the Bible is the true words of God and provides value as a guide for life.

Absolute Truth

Today's children are not being raised in an environment in which the concept of absolute moral truth

receives favorable treatment, and the widespread doubts about absolute truth are clearly affecting children.

While a robust 97% of 8- to 12-year-olds believe that there is an identifiable difference between right and wrong, a paltry one out of five (21%) believes that absolute moral truth exists. That is slightly less than the norm among adults (25%)—and indicative of the direction in which the nation is moving.

Means to Salvation

One out of every three preteens (36%) believes that the means to eternal salvation is by confessing their sins and asking Jesus Christ to save them from the consequences of their sin. That is the same proportion as found among adults (35%). The fact that preteens display a higher likelihood of acknowledging Jesus Christ as the only means to eternal life than do teenagers (21%) raises the probability that the current percentage will decline as today's preteens age—unless there is a concerted effort to prevent such a drop.

Life Purpose

Although nine out of 10 children ages 8 to 12 believe that they have an important reason for living, only one-quarter of preteens (27%) identified knowing, loving, and serving God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength as their chief purpose in life. That lags behind the proportion of adults choosing that as their dominant life purpose (36%). The most common life purpose listed by preteens was making the world a better place, while the other popular description related to facilitating their own happiness.

Success

Americans are known for their relentless pursuit of success. The catch is how “success” is defined. Most adults perceive success to be achieving personal happiness or freedom, being a “good” person, or experiencing a healthy and productive life without economic oppression. Three times as many adults select such outcomes as say that consistently obeying God's principles and commands are the primary indicator of success.

Not surprisingly, our young people are following the lead of their elders. Only one out of six (17%) consider the most accurate definition of life success to be consistent obedience to God.

Influencers and Children's Worldview

Based on his research showing that parents are among the main influences on their children's worldview, Barna pointed out the similarity of the parental beliefs to those of children. Of the five beliefs targeted in this report, there is only one for which the level of belief is statistically different between parents and children. Although only a minority of parents (44%) believes the Bible represents the true words of God that should serve as a basis for distinguishing right from wrong, that was nearly twice the level of children who believe the same thing.

Another group of potential influencers in the lives of many children are the pastors of children's ministries at Christian churches. The Cultural Research Center survey among a national sample of children's pastors found that of the five beliefs studied in this report, a majority of those pastors rejected one of the five biblical principles (the existence of absolute moral truth), and the other four were embraced by just a small minority of children's pastors. This coincides with the revelation contained in *Raising Spiritual Champions* that just one out of every eight children's pastors possess a

biblical worldview.

In fact, one of the challenges facing America’s children is that so few of their primary influencers have adopted and model the biblical worldview. The Cultural Research Center survey among parents of children under 13 reported that only 2% have a biblical worldview. The companion survey among pastors revealed that just 12% of children’s pastors have developed a biblical worldview. Add to that the variety of unbiblical worldviews persistently promoted by the single, most influential input into the minds and hearts of children—media content—and the difficulty of raising spiritual champions in contemporary America becomes clear.

A Worldview Comparison of Spiritual Beliefs of Preteens, Parents, and Children’s Pastors			
Belief	8 to 12 Year Olds	Parents	Children's Ministers
Jesus Christ is the only way to experience eternal salvation, based on confessing your sins and relying only upon His forgiveness of your sins	36%	34%	54%
The Bible is the true words of God that should be a guide to knowing right from wrong, and living a good life	25%	44%	62%
There are absolute truths – things that are right and things that are wrong, that do not depend on feelings, preferences, or circumstances – those truths are unchanging and knowable	21%	28%	36%
The main reason to live is to know, love and serve God, with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength	27%	33%	56%
Real success in life is consistently obeying God	17%	19%	42%

Sources: George Barna, *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child’s Heart, Mind and Soul*, Arizona Christian University Press: Glendale, AZ, 2023; *American Worldview Inventory 2022: A National Survey of Parents and Pastors*, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University; *American Worldview Inventory (Preteens and Adolescents)*, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, 2022.

Crisis Point

George Barna, Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center and professor at Arizona Christian University, explained that he wrote *Raising Spiritual Champions* because his research reveals a genuine cultural crisis that must be addressed immediately unless the nation is willing to cede the moral leadership to those who reject biblical principles.

“Children are intellectual and spiritual sponges in their preteen years. They are desperately trying to make sense of the world, their identity, their purpose, and how to live a meaningful and satisfying life,” Barna explained.

“Parents, in particular, have a duty to focus on and invest in the development of their child’s worldview, which is simply their decision-making filter for life. If parents do not fill that vacuum, other sources—such as the media, the schools, and even the child’s peers—will influence that worldview construction,” he said.

“The child’s worldview will inevitably develop. The critical questions are who will shape it and what

worldviews will be most forcefully and consistently proposed,” Barna said.

Like a growing chorus of the nation’s spiritual leaders, Barna believes this has reached crisis proportions in America. “If you follow the data, you learn that we have had a decreasing percentage of Americans embracing a biblical worldview since we started tracking this in the early 1990s. We have endured more than 30 years of consistent decline, with a very limited response by the Church. The incidence of biblical worldview among adults has dropped to just 4%, and among parents of young children it’s just 2%. You cannot get much lower.”

Barna placed the issue in context. “Because of the strong correlation between biblical worldview and genuine Christian discipleship, we are on the precipice of Christian invisibility in this nation unless we get serious about this crisis and invest heavily in fixing what’s broken,” he implored.

“This is so much more significant than the endless, simple-minded arguments in church circles about attendance and musical preferences. The worldview development of children is **the** existential challenge facing the American Church today,” Barna concluded.

About Raising Spiritual Champions

George Barna’s 60th book, *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child’s Heart, Mind and Soul* immediately became a bestseller on Amazon when it was released in late 2023. It remains a #1 Amazon bestseller in Christian Social Science. *Raising Spiritual Champions* has received wide attention in numerous national and regional media outlets since hitting the market.

Raising Spiritual Champions covers a variety of topics helpful to parents and Christian leaders, including research-based descriptions of how a child’s worldview develops; the relationships between worldview and discipleship; how parents can develop a simple plan to guide their child to a biblical worldview, and to become a disciple of Jesus Christ; the role churches and godly church leaders can play in that process; measuring the worldview of children; and more.

For more information about *Raising Spiritual Champions*—including information about discounts for quantity orders—visit www.RaisingSpiritualChampionsBook.com.

About the Research

The data referred to in this report are taken from surveys conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University (CRC) as part of the *American Worldview Inventory (AWVI)*. Begun as an annual tracking study in 2020, the *AWVI* surveys track the worldview of Americans based on several dozen worldview-related questions that fall within eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior, and identifying the incidence of various worldviews held by Americans. *The American Worldview Inventory* is the first-ever national survey conducted in the United States measuring the incidence of both biblical and competing worldviews.

This report draws data from five waves of the *AWVI* surveys. Included are the nationally representative survey of 2,000 adults, conducted in January 2023; the national sampling of parents of children under the age of 13, conducted among 600 qualified adults in January 2022; the national sampling of 600 pastors serving in Christian churches, conducted in February 2022; a national sampling of 400 teenagers (ages 13 through 18) undertaken in November and December of 2022; and the national sampling of 400 children between the ages of 8 and 12, interviewed in December 2022.

Additional reports from these surveys can be found on the CRC Research page on our website www.CulturalResearchCenter.com.

About the Cultural Research Center

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in Glendale, Arizona, conducts the annual *American Worldview Inventory* as well as other nationwide surveys regarding cultural transformation. Recent national studies completed by the Cultural Research Center have investigated topics related to worldview, discipleship, family, values, lifestyle, spiritual practices, and political engagement.

One of the groundbreaking efforts by CRC has been the worldview-related surveys conducted among the ACU student population. The first-of-its-kind ACU Student Worldview Inventory is administered to every ACU student at the start of each academic year, as well as a final administration just prior to graduation. The results of that student census enable the University to track and address the worldview development of its students.

CRC is guided by George Barna, Director of Research, and Tracy Munsil, Executive Director. Like ACU, CRC embraces biblical Christianity. CRC works in cooperation with a variety of Bible-centric, theologically conservative Christian ministries and remains politically non-partisan. Results from past surveys conducted by CRC and information about the Cultural Research Center are available at www.CulturalResearchCenter.com. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.ArizonaChristian.edu.